

## The Influence of the European Gymnastics Movement on Brazilian Physical Education: A Historical Analysis

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### Summary

The present research aims to analyze the influence of the European gymnastics movement on the history of physical education in Brazil. Using a qualitative and bibliographical approach, we seek to understand how different European gymnastic methods (Swedish, German and French) were introduced and adapted to the Brazilian reality, and what their impact was on the institutionalization of physical education in the country. The analysis shows that European gymnastics played a fundamental role in the training of teachers, the creation of schools and sports associations, and the organization of events and competitions, contributing to the construction of a sports culture and the appreciation of the body and health in society. Brazilian society. However, the research also points to the challenges and tensions present in this process, such as the need to adapt gymnastic methods to the Brazilian reality and criticism regarding the rigidity and disciplinary nature of some European models.

**Key words:**Physical Education, History, Gymnastics, Brazil, Europe.

### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the influence of the European gymnastic movement on the history of physical education in Brazil. Through a qualitative and bibliographic approach, it seeks to understand how the different European gymnastic methods (Swedish, German, and French) were introduced and adapted to the Brazilian reality, and what their impacts were on the institutionalization of physical education in the country. The analysis shows that European gymnastics played a fundamental role in the training of teachers, the creation of schools and sports associations, and the organization of events and competitions, contributing to building a sports culture and valuing the body and health in Brazilian society. However, the research also points out the challenges and tensions present in this process, such as the need to adapt gymnastic methods to the Brazilian reality and criticism regarding the rigidity and disciplinary nature of some European models.

**Keywords:**Physical Education, History, Gymnastics, Brazil, Europe.

### 1. Introduction

In the 19th century, physical education in Brazil was going through a period of transformation, driven by the Proclamation of the Republic and the search for a national identity. In this context, European gymnastics, with its systematized methods and its promise of physical and moral development, emerged as a model to be followed. The introduction of gymnastics in Brazil, initially in military schools and later in civilian schools, was marked by the influence of European immigrants and the creation of institutions and associations dedicated to the practice and teaching of gymnastics.

However, the adaptation of European gymnastic methods to the Brazilian reality was not a process free from challenges and controversies. Cultural, climatic and social differences demanded a contextualization of methods, and the models imported from Europe did not always suit the needs and requirements. characteristics of the Brazilian population. Criticism regarding the rigidity and disciplinary nature of some methods, as well as debates about the emphasis on gymnastics to the detriment of other bodily practices, marked the trajectory of physical education in the country.

This article seeks to analyze the influence of the European gymnastics movement on the history of physical education in Brazil, investigating how different gymnastic methods were introduced and adapted to the Brazilian context, and what their impacts were on the institutionalization of physical education and the construction of a sports culture in Brazil. country. The research, of a bibliographic and qualitative nature, is based on the analysis of historical documents, books, scientific articles and other relevant sources on the topic.

## 2. The Arrival of European Gymnastics in Brazil

The genesis of physical education in Brazil dates back to the 19th century, in a context marked by profound social and political transformations. The Proclamation of the Republic, in 1889, boosted the search for a national identity and the appreciation of civics and public health. In this scenario, European gymnastics emerged as a model to be followed, since its methods promised not only physical development, but also the moral and civic formation of individuals.

The first initiatives to introduce gymnastics in Brazil occurred in military schools, influenced by the Prussian tradition of physical training and discipline. Later, gymnastics was gradually incorporated into civilian schools, driven by doctors, pedagogues and intellectuals who recognized its benefits for health and education (SOARES, 2001).

The dissemination of European gymnastic methods in Brazil was strongly influenced by the presence of European immigrants, who brought their experiences and knowledge with them. German immigrants stand out, who founded gymnastics societies and schools in several cities across the country, such as Colégio Gymnasio in Porto Alegre and Sociedade Ginástica de Joinville (LANGLADE; LANGLADE, 2006).

The influence of European gymnastic methods was also manifested in the creation of institutions and associations dedicated to gymnastics, such as the São Paulo Gymnastics Federation (founded in 1927) and the Brazilian Gymnastics Confederation (founded in 1977). These institutions played a fundamental role in organizing sporting events, training teachers and promoting gymnastics as a social practice (RUBIO, 2002).

However, the introduction of European gymnastics in Brazil did not occur without adaptations and resistance. The country's climatic and cultural characteristics required a contextualization of gymnastic methods, and models imported from Europe did not always adapt to the Brazilian reality. Gymnastics, often seen as an elitist and disciplinary practice, also faced criticism from educators who advocated a more playful and inclusive approach to physical education (GHIRALDELLI JUNIOR, 2004).

Despite the challenges, European gymnastics left an important legacy for Brazilian physical education. His methods contributed to the systematization of the area, the training of teachers and the creation of a sports culture in the country. Furthermore, European gymnastics influenced the appreciation of the body and health, elements that remain present in Brazilian physical education to this day.

## 3. European Gymnastic Methods: A Mosaic of Influences on Brazilian Physical Education

The dissemination of gymnastics in Brazil did not occur homogeneously, but rather through the assimilation and adaptation of different European gymnastic methods, each with its specific characteristics and principles. The Swedish, German and French methods were the most influential, leaving profound marks on the formation of Brazilian physical education.

**3.1 Swedish Method:** Developed by Per Henrik Ling in the early 19th century, the Swedish method primarily zed health and hygiene, seeking the harmonious development of the body through systematized and progressive exercises. Swedish gymnastics was characterized by the precision of movements, the use of specific equipment (such as bars, benches and backrests) and the emphasis on discipline and order (LANGLADE; LANGLADE, 2006). In Brazil, the Swedish method found great reception in military and civilian schools, being considered an efficient and effective physical education model.

**3.2 German Method:** Created by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn at the beginning of the 19th century, the German method, also known as Turnen, he valued strength, agility and virility. The exercises were carried out on apparatus such as parallel bars, rings and pommel horse, and included outdoor activities such as running, jumping and fighting. Turnen had a strong nationalist and patriotic character, seeking to strengthen the spirit and unity of the German people (SOARES, 2001). In Brazil, the German method was introduced mainly by German immigrants and had a great influence on the formation of gymnastics clubs and associations.

**3.3 French Method:** The French method, developed by Francisco Amoros y Ondeano and Georges Demeny in the 19th century was characterized by a diversity of activities, including gymnastic exercises, games, sports and outdoor activities. Amoros advocated natural gymnastics, based on spontaneous movements and adapted to individual needs. Demeny, in turn, proposed scientific gymnastics, with precise and controlled exercises (RUBIO, 2002). In Brazil, the French method influenced the creation of

physical education schools and the organization of sporting events, such as the Brazilian Olympic Games.

The adaptation and application of European gymnastic methods to the Brazilian reality was not a simple process. Climatic, cultural and social differences required a contextualization of methods, and models imported from Europe did not always adapt to the needs and characteristics of the Brazilian population. Some critics, such as Rui Barbosa, questioned the suitability of European gymnastic methods for the tropical climate and the physical constitution of Brazilians (GHIRALDELLI JUNIOR, 2004).

Other debates revolved around the emphasis on discipline and order, present in Swedish and German methods, which were seen by some as excessively rigid and poorly suited to Brazilian culture. French gymnastics, in turn, was criticized for its lack of systematization and its emphasis on playful activities, which were considered ineffective for the physical and moral development of students.

Despite criticism and debate, European gymnastic methods left an important legacy for Brazilian physical education. They contributed to the systematization of the area, the training of teachers and the creation of a sports culture in the country. Furthermore, European gymnastics influenced the appreciation of the body and health, elements that remain present in Brazilian physical education to this day.

#### **4. The Institutionalization of Physical Education in Brazil: From European Gymnastics to the Construction of a National Identity**

The institutionalization of physical education in Brazil is intrinsically linked to the influence of the European gymnastics movement, which not only introduced different teaching methods, but also promoted the creation of schools, the training of teachers and the organization of sporting events. This process was fundamental for the consolidation of physical education as a school subject and for the construction of a national identity around sport and the appreciation of the body.

The inclusion of gymnastics in school curricula was an important milestone in this process. From the second half of the 19th century, gymnastics became mandatory in military schools and, later, in civilian schools. This obligation reflected the belief in the importance of gymnastics for the development of citizens, both from a physical and moral point of view (SOARES, 2001). Gymnastics was seen as a tool to strengthen the body and mind, prepare young people for military service, and instill values such as discipline, patriotism, and order.

The training of physical education teachers was also boosted by the institutionalization of gymnastics. The creation of normal schools and teacher training courses, often linked to military institutions, guaranteed the dissemination of European gymnastic methods and the training of qualified professionals to work in schools (GHIRALDELLI JUNIOR, 2004). These teachers, in turn, played a fundamental role in the dissemination of gymnastics and the consolidation of physical education as a school subject.

The organization of sporting events and gymnastics competitions also contributed to the institutionalization of physical education in Brazil. The holding of National Olympic Games, state and municipal championships, and other competitions provided visibility to gymnastics and encouraged the practice of sports throughout the country (RUBIO, 2002). These events not only promoted the health and physical development of participants, but also reinforced a sense of national identity and civic pride.

However, the institutionalization of physical education in Brazil did not occur without tensions and challenges. The need to adapt European gymnastic methods to the Brazilian reality, criticism regarding the rigidity and disciplinary nature of some methods, and debates about the emphasis on gymnastics to the detriment of other bodily practices, marked this process. Brazilian physical education, therefore, was built from a constant dialogue between European influences and the needs and characteristics of the national context.

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Despite the challenges, the institutionalization of physical education in Brazil, driven by European gymnastics, was fundamental for the consolidation of the area as a school subject and for the formation of a sports culture in the country. Gymnastics, as a body practice and as a pedagogical tool, left an important legacy for Brazilian physical education, which is reflected to this day in the appreciation of the body, health and physical activity as essential elements for the integral development of individuals.

#### **5. The Institutionalization of Physical Education in Brazil: From European Gymnastics to the Construction of a National Identity**

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## 6. Final Considerations

The European gymnastics movement, with its different methods and approaches, left an indelible mark on the history of Brazilian physical education. The genesis of physical education in Brazil, driven by the search for a national identity and the appreciation of health and civics, found in European gymnastics a model to be followed. The introduction and adaptation of Swedish, German and French methods shaped the practice of physical education in the country, influencing teacher training, the creation of institutions and the organization of sporting events.

European gymnastics not only contributed to the systematization of physical education as a school subject, but also played a fundamental role in building a sports culture and valuing the body and health in Brazilian society. Its principles and practices, although not always fully adapted to the Brazilian reality, were adapted and reinterpreted, giving rise to a physical education with its own characteristics, but which still bears the marks of its European origins.

4 However, the influence of European gymnastics was not without tensions and challenges. Criticism regarding the rigidity and disciplinary nature of some methods, as well as debates about the need to adapt gymnastics to the Brazilian reality, highlight the complexity of this process. Brazilian physical education, therefore, was built from a constant dialogue between external influences and the needs and characteristics of the national context.

The history of physical education in Brazil is, therefore, a story of encounters and disagreements, of adaptations and resistance, of influences and transformations. European gymnastics, as one of the main actors in this process, left a legacy that is reflected to this day in the way we understand and practice



physical education. Understanding this history is fundamental to building a more critical, reflective and contextualized physical education, which dialogues with the needs and challenges of contemporary Brazilian society.

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